

# Art with History: The Role of Spolia in the Cumulative Work of Art

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are visible witnesses of a rich past, yet they are also vital contributors to the meaning of the present. They make the work of art an art with history, a tangible history that is presumed to have reached a culminating height. As its frame of reference goes beyond allusion to a single group of forebears, which is often the case in revivalist arts, its multicultural attestations may form dynastic ladders and a thematic and cultural stratigraphy that support the claim of glorious global and temporal eminence.

Not every work achieves such fulsome eminence, but a surprising number attempt it. A first illustration of this phenomenon from the group of objects under review is the Herimann cross of the mid-eleventh century, usually dated ca. 1036-1056, and housed in the Cologne Diocesan Museum (Figs. 1 and 2). It has a stunning spool. The gilt bronze *corpus* of the crucified Christ made for this cross was cast to accommodate a Roman gemstone as the artistic equivalent of Christ's head. The precious lapis lazuli head is a beautifully carved example of first-century glyptic art and is convincingly shaped in the round, but it presents feminine features. Indeed, it actually portrays a woman, the Roman empress Livia.<sup>4</sup>

Recent scholarship demonstrates that this object was intended for the Altar of the Cross in the Cologne church of St. Maria im Kapitol, which was dedicated by Pope Leo IX, a member of the imperial family, in 1049.<sup>5</sup> The donors of the work, clearly represented on

also by Judson Emerick, Dorothy Glass, Dale Kinney, Thomas Lyman, Jill Meredith, Debra Pincus, and Gregory Whittington.  
<sup>4</sup> *Ornamenta Ecclesiae. Kunst und Künstler der Romanik*, exhib. cat. (Cologne 1985), vol. I, 134, 136, 157; vol. II, 27, 87, 207; U. Bracker-Westert, "Der Christuskopf vom Herimannkreuz—ein Bildnis der Kaiserin Livia," in *Rhein und Maas. Kunst und Kultur 800-1400*, vol. II (Cologne 1973), 177-180; H. Westermann-Angerthausen, "Westfälische Goldkreuze und ihre Voraussetzungen in Rheinland und Niedersachsen," in *Rhein und Maas*, vol. II, 181-190; M. Schulze-Döhlamm, in *Das Reich der Salier*, 1024-1125, exhib. cat., Historischen Museum der Pfalz (Sigmaringen 1992), 429-431.  
<sup>5</sup> R. Wesenberg, "Das Herimannkreuz," in *Rhein und Maas* (as in note 4), vol. II, 167-177, esp. 167.

**I**N HONOR of Kurt Weitzmann and the wide purview of his scholarly interests in medieval art—interests that extend beyond Byzantium to a number of Western centers of artistic enterprise, particularly those that exhibited special sensitivity to Byzantine culture—this paper will speak to the question of the role of spolia in the Byzantine-influenced art of Ottonian Germany.<sup>1</sup> Although the use of spolia during this period, particularly for *ars sacra* or sacred liturgical objects, has long been known, scholars have recently become increasingly attentive to the ideological bases of such use.<sup>2</sup> This paper examines the ideological aspect of Ottonian uses of spolia by considering the context and function of a group of objects dating from about 980 to 1060.<sup>3</sup> It will be argued that the works of art studied here reveal a particular perception of history, a history that is Christian but cumulative, in the sense that earlier cultures, both pagan and Christian, are summed within it. The works of art are aggregates, being made up of concrete remains of ancient Roman, Early Christian, Byzantine, Fatimid, Frankish, Anglo-Saxon, Merovingian, Carolingian, and/or earlier Ottonian artifacts which in sum represent the cultural foundations of the Ottonian era. These remains, or spolia, are held together in the matrix of the resultant new work in programmatic designs that indicate that the fusion, although a conglomerate, is also an artistic statement expressing a triumph of the whole over its own component parts, the present over its varied past. The spolia

<sup>1</sup> Among his many publications dealing with the Latin West, see especially "Various Aspects of Byzantine Influence on the Latin Countries from the Sixth to the Twelfth Century," *DOP* 20 (1966), 3-24, reprinted in *Art in the Medieval West and Its Contacts with Byzantium* (London 1982), no. 1.  
<sup>2</sup> W. Heckscher, "Relics of Pagan Antiquity in Medieval Settings," *JWarb* 1 (1937), 204-220; H. Westermann-Angerthausen, "Spolie und Umfeld in Egberts Trier," *ZKunstg* 50 (1987), 305-336. See also H. Mayr-Harting, *Ottoman Book Illumination: An Historical Study* (London 1991), vol. I, 179-200.  
<sup>3</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented by the author at the College Art Association annual meeting in Boston, 1987, as part of a panel organized by William Tronzo, entitled "The Perception of Antiquity in the Middle Ages: Ancient Spoils and Medieval Art," with papers

dress, his court protocol, his residence, his sentiment— with the triumphal sway of Christianity is implied by the elegant image of Christ engraved on the reverse side of the cross. There a laurel wreath over Christ's head and the dove of the Holy Spirit form counterparts to the wreath and eagle of Augustus on the display side. That this cross was used in the Aachen coronation ritual helps explain why the image of the crucified Christ should be relegated to the back of the cross while the Roman and Carolingian rulers dominate the front.

In the case of the Borghorst cross now in Münster (Figs. 4–6) the use of spolia affords more complex interpretation.<sup>10</sup> I believe it to be mid-eleventh century in date, ca. 1046–1056. The cross is fashioned around spolia from earlier eras, including ancient Roman intaglios, some representing classical deities, and it features splendid examples of tenth-century Fatimid rock crystal. Although these small crystal flasks were originally intended for personal, cosmetic use at a brilliant Islamic court, they serve here as the centerpiece of the work and function as reliquaries. The central crystal flask, which contains relics of Christ's passion (blood, sponge, and Cross), is inserted into the work so as to be visible from both sides. It is appropriately located beneath the reused repoussé depiction of the Crucifixion, a location that is suggestive in calling to mind the chalice often represented at the foot of Christ's Cross, an iconographic reference to the Church and its chief sacrament. The idea is enhanced by the red Byzantine textile within, just visible through the veil of the crystal. In-tercessory figures of Peter, Paul, Cosmas, and Damian make up the flanking repoussé reliefs. Below there is a second rock crystal, a perfume flask, which contains relics of saints and martyrs. The goldsmith work between the two crystals (Fig. 5) has been handled so that the reused repoussé figure of Emperor Henry, identified by the embossed inscription "he[nric[us] I[m]p[er]ator[us]," seems to fall to his knees in a gesture of prayer very like a Byzantine posture of proskynesis. He extends his arms upward toward the chalice-like crystal flask containing the Passion relics, while a pair of angels hovers above him. A large intaglio cut with a standing pagan god abouts the base of the flask. Interestingly, this antique stone is set on its side like a toppled idol.

Confirmation that the positioning of Henry's gesture

the reverse (Fig. 2)—the archbishop of Cologne, Herimann II, and his sister, Ida, abbess of the St. Maria im Kapitol community—were grandchildren of the German emperor Otto II and his empress, the famous Byzantine Theophano. The gem is thought to have come to Herimann and Ida as a family heirloom, perhaps with the dissemination of the Ottonian treasury early in the century.<sup>6</sup> Its reference to the Roman Livia must have been vague in their minds, mingling as it does with references to Early Christian and Byzantine art conjured up by the work and by its intended location on the St. Maria im Kapitol altar: these include the surrounding trefoil-plan church, recalling Early Christian triconchs; the soon to be installed narrative doors, recalling those of Santa Sabina; the youthful, feminine, lapis face of the crucified on the cross itself, suggesting the beardless Christ of Early Christian art; and, especially, the donors' attitudes of proskynesis before the patroness of the church, Mary, recalling examples of contemporary Byzantine art.<sup>7</sup> Paramount must have been the gem's documentation of the noble lineage of its former owners, through their German, so-called Roman, imperial line, which the lapis assures. This use of spolia in the cross thus induces a whole range of references, one building on the other, none limited to Rome alone, and the whole depending for its ultimate meaning on the contemporary as well as the cumulative effect of these associations. Upon the altar in Cologne, the associations must have articulated well the high status of Herimann and Ida.

Such an accretive context of references is explicit in the well-known Lothar cross of ca. 1000, which is considered a gift of the emperor Otto III to Aachen Cathedral (Fig. 3).<sup>8</sup> Its fine goldsmith work surrounds a Roman cameo of Augustus, an example of spolia of the first order. Also important, and also spolia in a sense, is the crystal below. It is a seal made for Otto's Carolingian predecessor, King Lothar II (855–869), for whom the cross is named.<sup>9</sup> With these two gems, dynastic lineage and authority for Otto as "Emperor of the Romans," reaching back through the accumulated phases of "Roman" history, including both ancient Roman and the political hegemony of an Augustus-like Otto—Otto III was the most Roman of this dynasty, in his

<sup>6</sup> D. Kötzsche, in *Rhein und Maas* (as in note 4), vol. I, B2, 197; Wesenberg, "Herimannkreuz" (as in note 5), 170–171, 175; R. Steinbach, "Die Bzonen," in *Das Dritte Jahrtausend: Kultur und Kunst im westlichen Abendland an Rhein und Ruhr*, vol. II (Düsseldorf 1964), 858–859. <sup>7</sup> Wesenberg, "Herimannkreuz" (as in note 5), 174–175. <sup>8</sup> H. Schnitzler, *Rheinische Schatzkammer* (Düsseldorf 1957), no. 32, pls. 90–95; P. Lasco, *Arts Sacra*, 800–1200 (Harmontsworth 1972), 100–101; P. Schramm and R. Mütcherich, *Denkmale der deutschen Könige und Kaiser* (Münich 1962), nos. 30, 106; H. Füllitz, "Ottonische Goldschmiedekunst," in *Bernward von Hildesheim und das Zeitalter der Ottonen*, exhib. cat., Diocesan Museum (Hildesheim 1993), vol. I, 176.

vol. II, 350–352.

<sup>9</sup> G. Kornhuber, "The Seal of Lothar II: Model and Copy," *Francia* 17 (1990), 55–68. <sup>10</sup> J. L. Lückhardt, in *Ornamenta Ecclesiae* (as in note 4), vol. III, 106–108; Westermann-Angerhausen, "Westfälische Goldkreuze" (as in note 4); H. Bickel, "Das Borghorst Stiftskreuz," in *1000 Jahre Borghorst. Festschrift der Stadt Borghorst im Jahre der 1000 Wiederkehr der Gründung des Stiftes* (Borghorst 1968), 45–55; M. Schulze-Döhlmann, in *Das Reich der Salier* (as in note 4), 278–281; G. Jasza, in *Imagination des Unsichtbaren. 1200 Jahre bildende Kunst im Bistum Münster, exhib. cat.* (Münster 1993).

via the opulent rock crystals that are focal in the design of the cross. There, in an engraved and inscribed design, Bertha, donor of the work and abbess of the Borghorst convent, exactly echoes Henry's obelance. Placed between the two crystal reliquaries, she occupies the position on this side directly corresponding to Henry's opposite. According to the inscription, she petitions for salvation and requests the intercession of the saints whose relics are enclosed here. The fact that this Abbess Bertha bears the same name as the founder of her convent, Bertha, likens her to her illustrious predecessor in local Borghorst history even as her pose links her to her imperial analogue, Henry.

The question of which Henry is represented on the cross is still being debated. In my view the style and technique of the repoussé panels indicate that they are all spolia from the time of Henry II (1014–1024). It is clear, however, that this cross was made to receive them and that they were not added haphazardly to the work after its completion but were basic to its original conception. I believe that they were salvaged from another unknown source and reused here by Abbess Bertha, most likely with the hope of an intentional equivocal reference, in the time of Henry III (1046–1056). The later Henry was a great patron of the Borghorst abbey and his dates coincide with those of Abbess Bertha. Her exact history is unknown but her tenure at the abbey can be placed in the mid-eleventh century. Although the spolia might have passed from Henry II to others and come to Borghorst either via Henry III or Bertha, the emphasis upon Bertha as abbess suggests that she was the conceiver of the project. Of course the relics may also be thought of as spolia, just as the crystals are, and all of these lend important associative value to the form of Bertha. Whatever their source, in employing them Bertha manifested her importance within a long lineage: it leads from the time of pagan imperial Rome, recalled by the Roman gems; the time of Christ's Passion, recalled by his Crucifixion and his relics; and the work of his followers, the apostles Peter and Paul and his martyrs, Cosmas, Damian, and others, recalled in the repoussé panels and the relics; through the wider spheres of the Byzantines, via the textiles and the proskynesis poses, as well as the Fatimid caliphs, signaled by the crystals; to the Ottonian and Salian emperors, i.e., Henry. This metaléptic chain is particularly enriched by the prestigious references to Fatimid culture

The nature of Ottonian *ars sacra* that provides such a graphic analogue to the medieval concept of Christian history is well represented in the reliquary shrine of St. Andrew, made for Archbishop Egbert at Trier ca. 977–983, and housed in the Trier Cathedral Treasury (Figs. 7 and 8).<sup>12</sup> This shrine, encasing a part of the sandal of St. Andrew, is a veritable compendium of goldsmithing techniques: gold repoussé, gilded silver, niello, engraving, *opus interrasile*, gold filigree, among others, combined with cloisonné and champlevé enamels and elegant ivory paneling. The whole was originally capped by an ornament, perhaps a figured Fatimid rock crystal, atop the pedestal of the foot. Against the central ivory panels on each of the long sides are reused gilt bronze lions, probably of late seventh- or early eighth-century date. They are of the Anglo-Saxon (Hiberno-Saxon) style that can be associated with early Echternach and Trier manuscripts. The special incrustations of the narrow rear panel are additional spolia. The circular brooch of splendid garnet inlay, which was formerly called Frankish, has recently been shown to be a Trier work of the second half of the sixth century.<sup>13</sup> It enfames a gold coin of the Byzantine emperor Justinian. The interesting point made by these objects of ancient and different cultural origin—Fatimid(?), Anglo-Saxon, Merovingian, and Byzantine—is that they are featured as fully as the

<sup>11</sup> K. J. Leyser, *Medieval Germany and Its Neighbors 900–1250* (London 1982), 111–112. One might compare the conflation of Denis at Saint-Denis; S. Crosby with P. Blum, *The Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis* (New Haven 1987), 3–6.

<sup>12</sup> Westermann-Angerhausen, "Spolie und Umfeld" (as in note 2), gives the earlier literature, including her own detailed dissertation, *Die Goldschmiedekunst der Trierer Bistumskirche* (Beiträge, *Trierer Zeitschrift* 36 [1973]) (Trier 1973), 53ff., and the basic study of R. Rademacher, "Der Trierer Bistumskirche. Seine Beziehungen zur fränkisch-karolingischen

Goldschmiedekunst," *Trierer Zeitschrift* 11 (1936), 144–166; A. von Buv and H. Westermann-Angerhausen, in *Rhein und Mosel*, vol. I (Cologne 1972), C1, 177; R. König, in *Schatzkunst Trier* (Trier 1984), no. 23, see also nos. 6 and 12. For the engraving of 1655, which shows an ornament in place atop the foot, see Westermann-Angerhausen, "Spolie und Umfeld," fig. 9.

<sup>13</sup> B. Archenius, *Merovingian Garnet Jewelry. Emergence and Social Implications* (Stockholm 1985), 170–171.





that idea. The clash of cultural and religious values introduced into these sacred monuments by the spoils is too blatant, however, for this explanation to suffice. Considering the awesome resources at the disposal of these patrons and the heavy expenditures these compositions must have required, and particularly considering the exquisite quality of the Ottonian workmanship, which in every case is designed specifically for the spoils and indicates a taste neither awkward nor ostentatious, further explanation is in order.

According to Dobner, Henry's ambo would have stood originally at the entrance to the Carolingian choir of the palace chapel (Fig. 10) where it would have focused sight lines for all viewers looking toward the sanctuary.<sup>22</sup> The sheen of these huge Roman and Fatimid vessels would have carried the cross theme of the ambo well across the chapel. The "apotropaicization" or Christianization of their paganism by their collective form of the cross would have been pleasant for an enthroned sovereign opposite to contemplate, as would the wide sway of influence implied by their presence. The ambo was placed on axis with the altar of Mary and with the tombs of Charlemagne and Otto III, both just behind it and surely linked with it in what we might call a symbolic political program. If we recall Henry's struggle to succeed to the throne following Otto III's death, the ambo's spoils take on special meaning. Otto III, who was childless, died suddenly in January, 1002. In the confusion following his demise, his cousin Henry quickly seized power in what amounted to a coup d'état. Henry's presumption was vigorously contested. Resentment that had risen at the time of the succession of Otto III, directed at his family line, resurfaced. Also, in his attempts to further monastic independence from episcopal authority during his tenure as Duke of Bavaria, Henry had engendered differences with the powerful princely bishops whose support he desperately needed later in his claim for kingship, but who then preferred his rival. Winning Willigis to his side, he hastily had himself crowned king at Mainz in June of 1002. His support was still very weak, however, and he worked energetically to broaden and consolidate it. Within a few months he succeeded. His efforts to secure his authority as king are surely reflected in his insistence on a second coronation as king, with full formal ritual, in the Aachen palace chapel, on 8 September 1002.<sup>23</sup> Dobner considers the ambo commis-

<sup>22</sup> Dobner, "Studien zu den Ambo" (as in note 16), fig. 145; N.B. fig. 142 (reproduced here as Fig. 10), showing Dobner's reconstruction of the original locations of the ambo, altar, and tombs.  
<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 355; T. Reuter, *Germany in the Early Middle Ages* (London 1991), 186-187; Mayr-Harting, *Ottoman Book Illumination* (as in note 2), vol. I, 193-196; H. T. Mikolitzky, *Kaiser Heinrich II. und die Kirche* (Vienna 1946), 2, 13-15. For the enhancement of the conception of sacred kingship through the use of symbolic ritual, including the coronation at Aachen and the ceremonial transfer to Henry of the Holy Lance,

Brinka Dobner's intensive study of the ambo and its wood core reveals that the ambo was made for these ancient pieces of art, which must have been highly prized treasures. The agate bowls would have been of unusual size and value. Above and below are inscriptions referring to these gems and to the dedication of the work to the Virgin. The donor, who gave personally of his possessions for this commission, is named "REX PIUS HEINRICUS," the pious King Henry II. The placement of these words directly above and on axis with the name of the Virgin gives them special prominence. Also, the *enamel brun* technique is interestingly reversed in the inscription, allowing Henry's name and title, "REX," to be highlighted in gold.

As with the Andrew shrine, we observe that in the ambo the spoils are ancient works, mostly pagan but not exclusively Roman in character and origin, and that they are used to honor art having a particularly serious religious function. They are assigned privileged positions within the artistic design that conveys their honorific mission. Indeed the spoils are focal elements of the overall scheme and are not simply tucked into marginal borders. In the ambo a Roman bowl is used where we might expect a bust of Christ, in a clipeus, say, surrounded by the four writers of the Gospels (as in the *Triser Gospels*). Percy Schramm and Florentine Mutherich thought that this was the original scheme of the ambo,<sup>20</sup> but that conjecture is disproved by traces of the original mount and by analysis of the carving of the wood core, which was hollowed to accept a circular dish of just the kind we see there at present. Its domical shape strengthens the simple cruciform design, which is analogous to book covers, stauroliths, and portable altars like the *Portale* of Henry (1014-1024) in Munich.<sup>21</sup> By stressing the cumulative character of these works, I do not mean to imply that they are simply pastiches, serendipitous accumulations of varied sumptuous materials and techniques, even though the exotic arts of ancient Rome, Coptic Alexandria, and Fatimid Egypt were all highly prized (and, with regard to Byzantine art, certainly envied) in Ottonian court circles, and even though those circles were not completely above aristocratic ostentation. The possibility that a number of the pieces came from an imperial Byzantine treasure via envoys and embassies, exchanges of gifts from both Fatimid and Byzantine courts, and passed through the Ottonian families as heirlooms, would seem to support

loser, "Theophilus Presbyter und die Inkunabeln des mittelalterlichen Kristallschiffs an Rhein und Maas," in *Rhein und Maas* (as in note 4), vol. II, 287-296; W. Holzhausen, "Bergkristallarbeiten des Mittelalters," *ZBfMG* 64 (1930-31), 199-205, 216-221; P. Kahle, "Die Schätze der Fatimiden," *ZDMG* 89 (1935), 329-362.  
<sup>21</sup> Ibid., no. 134; H. Füllitz, "Das Kreuzreliquiar Kaiser Heinrichs II. in der Schatzkammer der Münchner Residenz," *Münchner Jahrbücher*, N.F., 9/10 (1958-59), 15-31.

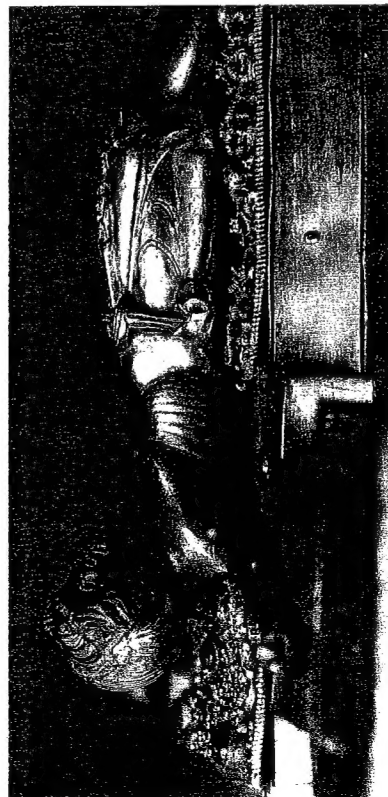
sioned for that occasion. With its prominent inscription, "REX PIUS HEINRICUS," with its extravagant Roman spolia, with its crystals suggesting broad realms of noble connection, and with its location adjacent to the tombs of his illustrious predecessors, the emperors Charlemagne and Otto III, the ambo must have trumpeted well Henry's presumed dynastic legitimacy. He could well then aspire to empire. He received the imperial crown in Rome twelve years later, in 1014. In a more general sense the ambo gave visible expression to the ascendancy of contemporary Ottonian Christendom over Roman, Alexandrian, and Fatimid forebears. Indeed, this

see K. Leyser, *Rule and Conflict in an Early Medieval Society* (London 1979), 78-82, 94-97, 99-101.

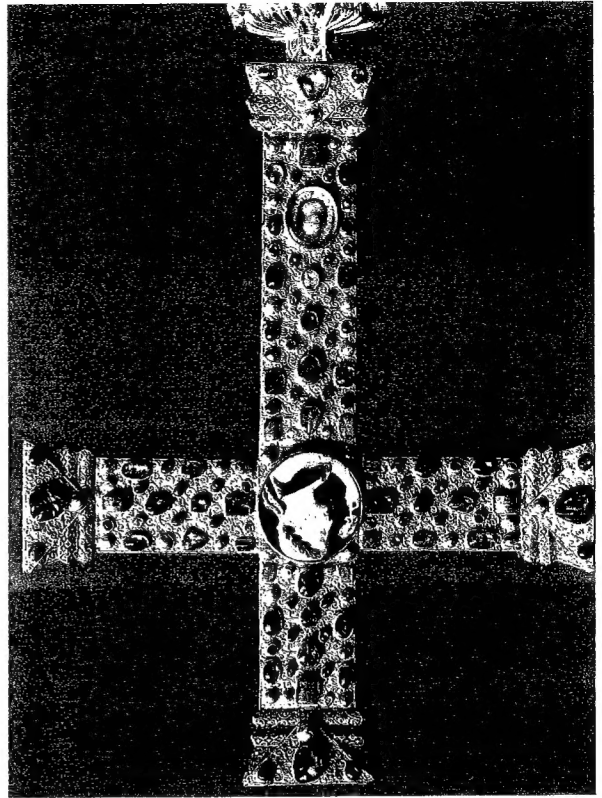
statement of the Ottonian fulfillment of the concept of a cumulative and culminating Christian history, conceived not so much as a *renovatio* as a *culminatio*, was a worthy rival to similar Byzantine pretensions. The Byzantines' own use of spolia is of course renowned.<sup>24</sup> The Ottonian difference is in the breadth of the range of reference. Later periods also make use of the symbolic and programmatic possibilities of spolia but rarely do they evoke such broad and deep strata of history.

*The University of Michigan*

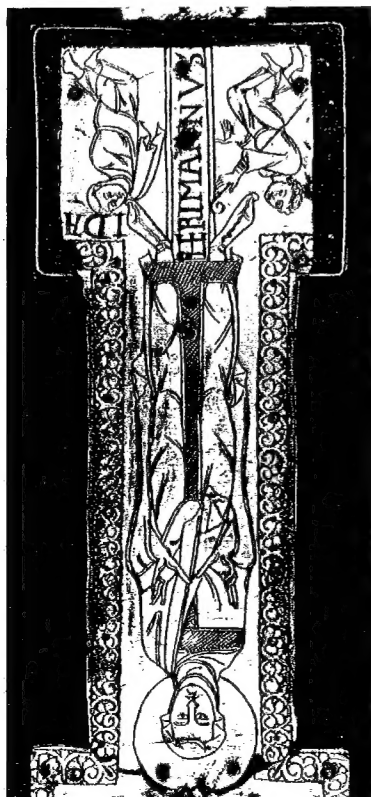
<sup>24</sup> *The Treasury of San Marco, Venice*, ed. D. Buckton, exhib. cat., Metropolitan Museum of Art (Milan 1984), passim.



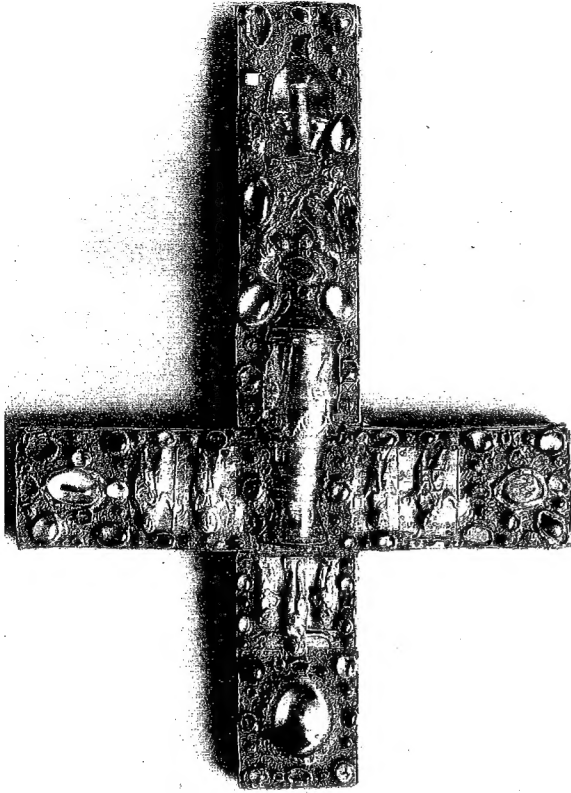
1. Cologne, Diocesan Museum,  
Herimann cross



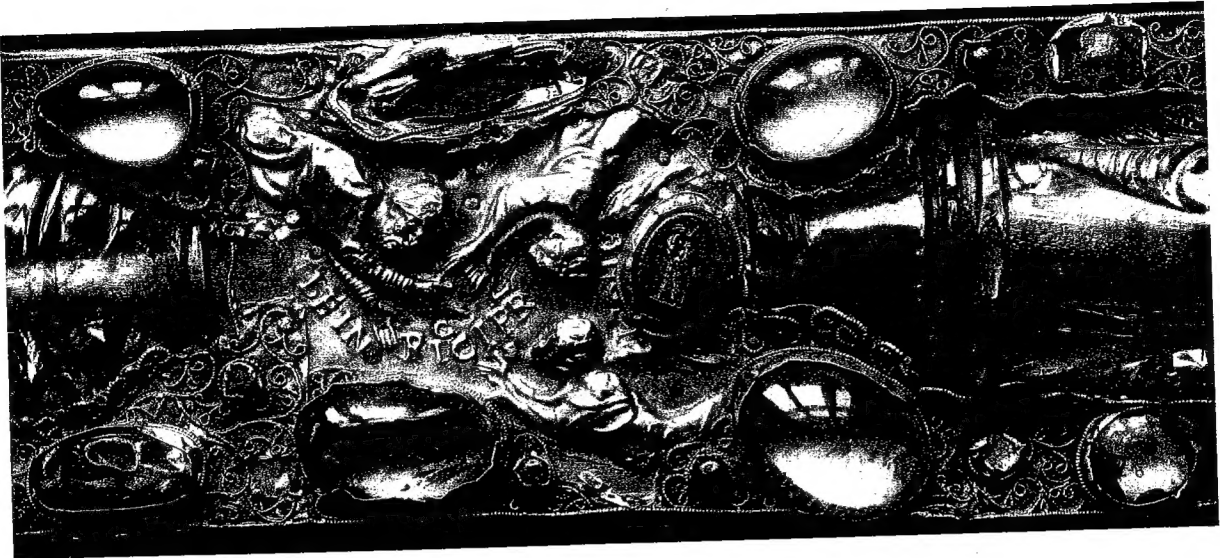
3. Aachen, Cathedral Treasury, Lothar cross



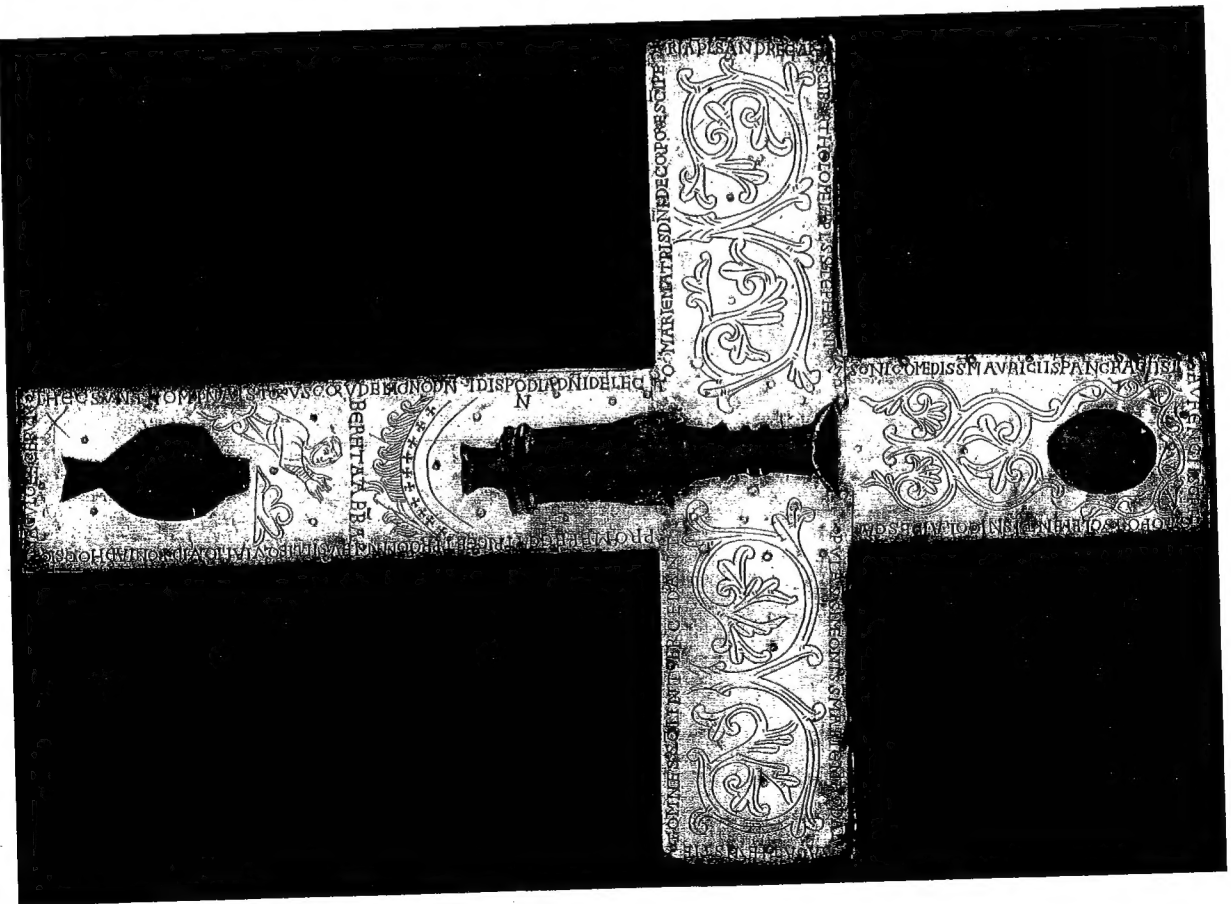
2. Cologne, Diocesan Museum,  
Herimann cross, detail of the back



4. Münster, Landesmuseum, Borghorst cross



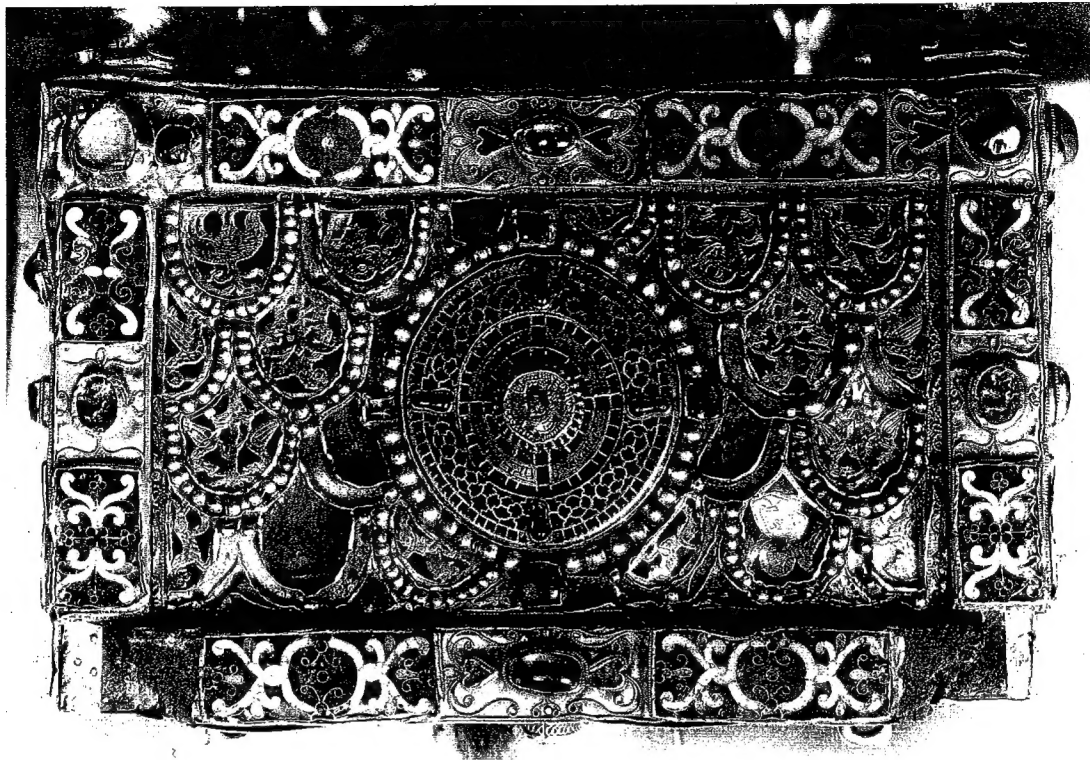
5. Münster, Landesmuseum, Borghorst cross, detail



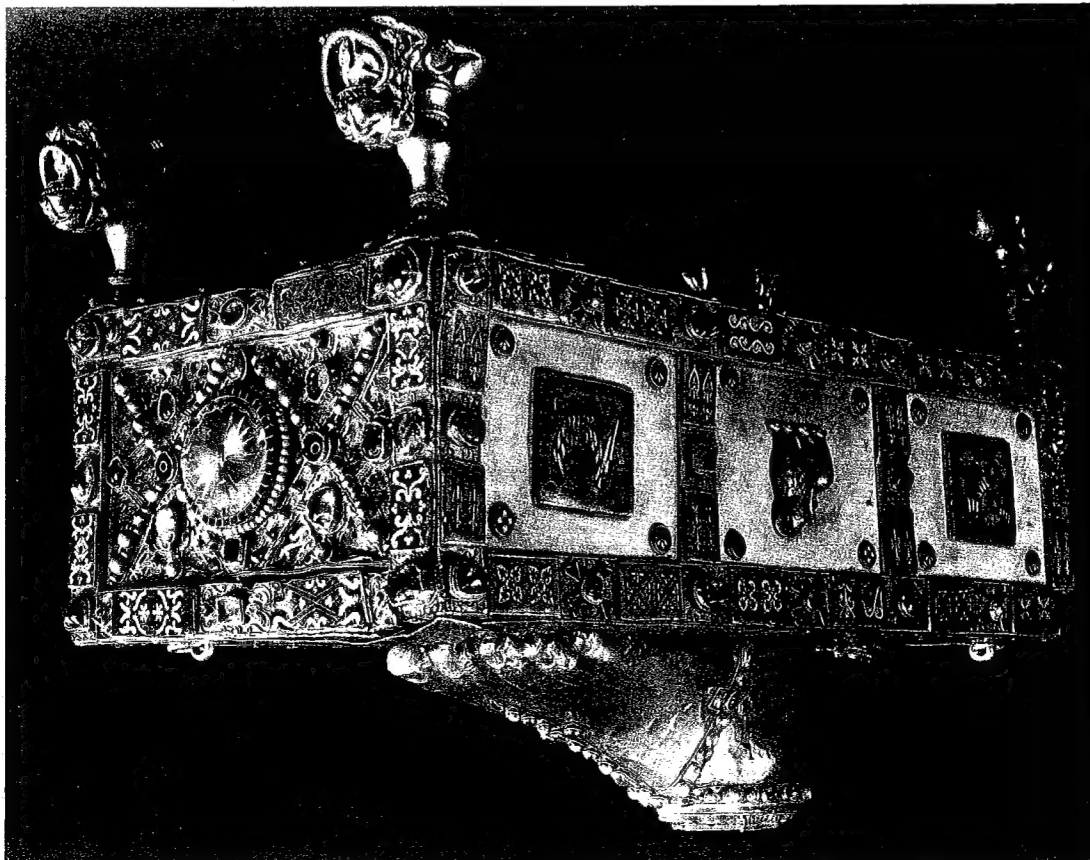
6. Münster, Landesmuseum, Borghorst cross, back



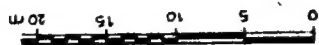
8. Trier, Cathedral Treasure, Egbert shrine, detail



7. Trier, Cathedral Treasure, Egbert shrine

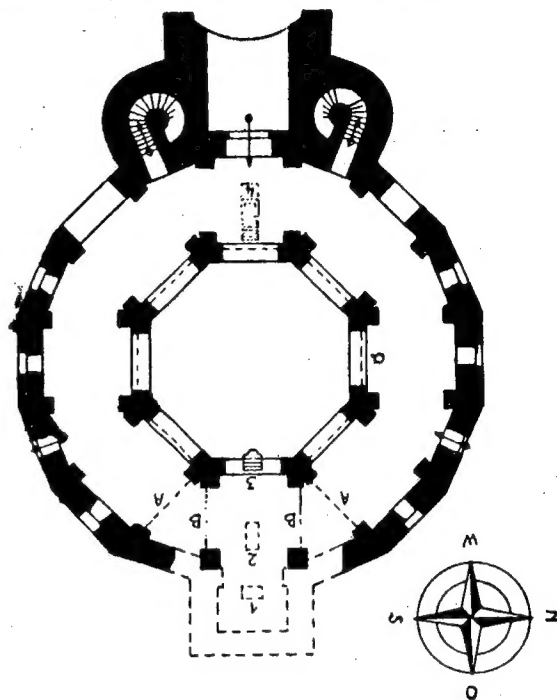


10. Aachen, palace chapel, ambo of Henry II, reconstruction showing original location within the chapel



— — — A, a) Schranken nach  
BUCHKREMER  
... B) Hypothetische Variante von A

1. Marienaltar
  2. Grab Ottos III.
  3. Ambo Heinrichs II.
  4. Thron Karls des Großen
- in der Oberkirche



9. Aachen, palace chapel, ambo of Henry II

